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An IELTS Task 1 Autonomous Collaborative Personal Learning Environment

Student Dissertation

How to cite:

Davies, Gareth (2014). An IELTS Task 1 Autonomous Collaborative Personal Learning Environment. Research Summary for the Open University module H818 The Networked Practitioner

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THU: An IELTS Task 1 Autonomous Collaborative Personal Learning Environment (Gareth Davies)

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[Dr Simon Ball](#)

2 February 2014

The topic of my presentation will be PLEs (Personal Learning Environments) and how tying together Web 2.0 applications and social networks can engender a potent learning environment within the theme of implementation.

The PLE will facilitate self-directed learning and autonomy in approaching an IELTS Task 1 writing question (provided on a weekly basis) where participants will collaborate to create an answer to a question set in a purpose-designed social network group within Facebook. The PLE will also provide participants who upload their finished work and a video of the process taken with access to peer review, assessment, feedback and afford them the opportunity to reflect on their work before consolidating their skills with a new question.

The PLE and activity will be achieved purely through the use of sites and software that meet the criteria of being being free, accessible, flexible, and easy to use. Simply put, 'Good enough technology' (Capps, 2009). These Web 2.0 applications allow participants with access to the internet and the necessary hardware to facilitate their use to interact and collaborate within social media settings to create user-generated output in virtual communities and in doing so break down the traditional divide between environment and learning.

In terms of the more language-centred benefit of the availability of this artefact to the target audience of L2 learners, 'There is a principle underlying current ELT practice that interaction pushes learners produce more accurate and appropriate language, which itself provides input for other students' (Hedge, 2000, p.15). Therefore, there is the two-pronged benefit of becoming more accustomed to and competent in approaching the target task as well as the communicative benefit of their having to exercise their expressive and receptive language skills together in a free, and expressive online environment of their own design.

The primary question is can the PLE be as successful as a purpose built virtual learning environment and thus truly democratize the learning process, making available to anyone with an internet connection the same valuable learning environment afforded those with the access and the funds to both institution run VLEs and bricks and mortar establishments such as language schools such as The British Council.

The presentation will be a multimedia presentation including video describing the process, its

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benefits and, a short video-captured demonstration of participants doing the activity. Participants will be assembled from existing British Council students as well as from social networking sites, and the efficacy of the activity will be gauged by surveying participants according to their thoughts on the PLE's usability, their engagement, and perceived improvement.

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[Sian Lovegrove](#)

2:31pm 6 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

As an IELTS examiner, I look forward to hearing your presentation. Sian



[Jonathan Vernon](#)

8:14am 12 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

I particularly like the 'good enough' point of view - and have seen this approach decimate the industry I came from - video based training. 'Good enough' with modern cameras and kit generally means DIY. It would be interesting to have a standardized way to assess one's PLE so that across student groups, cohorts, subjects and so on realistic comparisons could be made and shared. It often feels, when you see someone's PLE that you are looking into their 'hand bag' or 'man bag'! Then of course your PLE changes as you are exposed to new tools and discover that you have your favourites; it changes again for compatibility reasons when working with others. You can then develop a resistance to change for the sake of it especially as similar tools and platforms each have, as we are learning with this conference, their foibles. I wonder if I had a set of six, place mat like laminated cards with different PLEs on them I would be able to stick one in front of, in turn, a GCSE student, an A level student and a post grad ... with variations between arts and sciences, academic and applied subjects, and suggest to them, these are the kinds of tools and platforms you should be trying? (Mouse mats instead of okace mats perhaps!?). Good luck, I'll follow with interest.



[Cara Saul](#)

4:43pm 12 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Liked the handbag analogy

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Think many students struggle with their PLE because the choice is so wide



[Jonathan Vernon](#)

12:02pm 13 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

'Freedom is lack of choice'? Not as random as it sounds, more about opinion leaders making informed recommendations so that you are given a couple of choices, not many. I loathe lists. They are pointless and usually list 50 or 100 hopeless tools and resources. Go where it is trending and be reading to jump ship as something better comes along ... and recommend it objectively as a duty to fellow users.



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

6:46pm 13 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Following the live presentations, we asked each speaker to respond to questions posed by audience members. In the short time available, it was not possible to put all of the questions submitted to the speaker for a response. We asked all speakers if they would respond to the unanswered questions here on Cloudworks. Here are all of the questions asked during the session:

- ▶ Do universities manage this using one specific system?



[Gareth Davies](#)

6:11am 14 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

There are two standardised English tests that predominate, IELTS and TOEFL. IELTS is what universities in the UK and Australia tend to ask for while TOEFL is usually sought after in the US and Canada. However, they are usually recognised in all territories as the scores can be converted <http://www.ets.org/toefl/institutions/scores/compare/>

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